

ADDING SOLID FOOD TO YOUR BABY'S DIET AGE 4 – 6 MONTHS

Infant feeding is an area of great controversy in child rearing. There are many conflicting opinions as to when solid foods should be introduced. While many views exist, there are only two reasons for beginning solids. One is to meet the baby's nutritional needs. The other is to encourage and support the developmental changes your baby is experiencing.

Breastmilk or formula provides the infant with all the nutrients she needs until 4 – 6 months of age. When a baby starts eating solid foods; breastmilk or formula, intake decreases. It is important to note that when solids are started too early (before 4-6 months) foods that do not meet the baby's nutrient needs will replace some of the more nutritionally balanced milk feedings. Only in well-defined instances should a baby start eating solids before 4 months of age. Consult your pediatrician or nurse practitioner to determine what is best for your child.

Between 4 and 12 months of age, the infant goes through a transition period of eating. She progresses from only nursing or taking formula from a bottle to drinking from a cup and eating table foods. During this transition period, it is important to offer your baby foods that meet her nutritional needs and provide her with textures and consistencies that gradually help her learn to eat table food.

Your baby's stage of development determines her readiness for solids. Infant nervous systems develop at varying rates. Your baby is ready if she can sit up with little or no support has good head and neck control, opens her mouth when she sees something coming, and has good coordination between movements of the tongue and swallowing.

Moving through the transition period from milk feeding to table foods is easier when solids are started later rather than earlier. The earlier solids are started the longer you have to deal with feeding spoons, baby food warmers, baby food, etc.

The best "first foods" are iron-fortified, dry infant cereal mixed with formula or breastmilk and strained meats. These are the best choices because these foods are high in iron and zinc, which are especially important for the breastfeeding infant.

Start out with one feeding daily. It does not matter with which meal you begin. Choose a time when your baby is calm and alert. If your baby is extremely hungry she may not be interested in learning the new skill of eating off a spoon. You may need to offer the breast briefly or an ounce or two of formula the first few times to take the edge

off the baby's hunger. Using an infant feeding spoon makes the feeding easier. Place a small amount of food on the tip of the spoon when feeding. Make mealtime pleasant. Talk to your baby. Show your pleasure at her accomplishment.

Unless your baby has what is known as *reflux*, do not put cereal in her bottle of formula. The cereal increases the calorie content of the formula. The baby is then forced to consume too many calories attempting to meet her need for fluid. A baby that is ready for solids is able to learn how to eat off a spoon. If your baby consistently rejects spoon-feeding, then wait a day or so before trying again.

Begin with 1-2 teaspoons of strained meat or dry cereal that has been mixed with enough liquid to make it creamy. If the cereal is too thick it will be difficult to swallow and the baby may gag on it. The temperature should be no more than lukewarm.

If the baby tolerates rice cereal or a specific meat for 3-5 days, you may try other single grain cereals like oatmeal and barley cereal and other meats. Save mixed cereal and cereals mixed with fruit for later on after the baby has had each of the ingredients alone first.

Gradually work up to 2 servings a day for cereal (2 tablespoons/serving) or meat (1-2 oz/day of strained meat or 1-2 small jars of commercially prepared meat/day – ex. – Gerber “2nd foods” meats)

Once the baby is doing well with taking cereal and/or meats you can begin trying fruits and vegetables. The order in which these foods are introduced is not critical. If your baby resists taking cereal at first, a little applesauce or other fruit with cereal often prompts her to be more interested. Try to model the solid feedings into meals. For example, give cereal and fruit at one meal and cereal or meat and a vegetable at another.

Introduce one new food at a time. Try each new food for approximately 3-5 days. Watch your infant for signs of an allergic reaction such as diarrhea, vomiting, skin rashes, respiratory congestion, or wheezing. If you see a reaction, omit that food for 2 –3 weeks and then try it again. (If the reaction is severe, check with us first.)

There is no need to rush through introducing all the available fruits and vegetables. Take your time. Again, allow 3-5 days between each new food so that you can check for allergic reactions.

You may start offering liquid in a cup at any time. Formula or breastmilk may be used. Save fruit juice for after age 6 months. A cup with a spout may be useful but is not essential. Try cup feeding along with a meal and offer the breast or bottle after the meal.

You may choose to make your own baby food. Use fresh fruits and vegetables. They are the most nutritious and contain no extra sugar, salt or other food additives. If a canned fruit is used, choose one that is packed in fruit juice. Canned vegetables should contain no added salt. When making baby foods be sure your hands and all utensils are very clean. Cook fruits and vegetables until tender in a small amount of water or use a steamer. Strain the food using a baby food grinder, blender, food processor, or food mill. Add an appropriate liquid (fruit juice, cooking water, water, milk, or formula) as needed to get the desired consistency. A baby of 4 – 6 months will need a very smooth texture. Later on you will be able to make foods with more texture. Homemade baby foods may be frozen in ice cube trays. Once frozen, pop the food cubes out, place them in a freezer-proof plastic bag, and store them in the freezer.

Research clearly indicates that an infant may reject new flavors at first. (This is a natural defense against poisoning.) Therefore, if your baby spits out her food or makes a face, don't give up! Infants may take 10 – 15 exposures before accepting a new food.

DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERN AND FEEDING RECOMMENDATION 4 –6 MONTHS

FEEDING STYLE

- Spoon feeding

FOOD SELECTION

- Strained, semi-solid foods like iron-fortified infant cereal, strained fruits and vegetables

READINESS SIGNS

- Controls head and neck
- Sits with little or no support
- Can put lips on rim of cup
- Brings hands to mouth; picks up and puts objects in mouth
- Tongue can transfer food to back of mouth for swallowing.